

## Not Just Any Job

### Context:

This class is a group of English-speaking mothers whose goal of preparing for employment has been highlighted because it is also the [program goal](#) of the welfare-to-work program they attend <sup>1</sup>. Some of the students have work experience; others had children during or immediately following high school and have not had a job outside the home. Their reading abilities seem to vary widely by type of text. Most of them do well reading magazines, for example, but have more trouble with informational text or longer narrative. Denise, the teacher, believes that the students need practice with a broader variety of texts - they are competent at using the reading strategies needed for the narrow range of texts they read, but are weak in other kinds of reading that will be needed for work. Based on their standardized test scores and her observations of their reading, Denise has assessed most of the students at [EFF performance level 4](#), with a couple of students at the levels above and below.

During the first few weeks of class, the group began discussing their experience of work and what they considered a good job. Most recently, they had been talking about the rise in home health aide and nursing assistant jobs due to the aging U.S. population. Several of the women said that they would like this kind of job; others said they'd prefer to be doctors.

Denise noted that they could find out more about all of these jobs by doing some investigation on the Internet. Did they want to do that (which would also address the goals of some to get more comfortable on the computer)? They said they did, but they first wanted to just watch her use the web to look for information. They crowded around as Denise used "Google" to search for information on health care job trends and found many information-packed websites - websites that were so dense with information and links that everyone was overwhelmed. She realized she hadn't planned this foray into web searching very well, so she paused and suggested a change of plan. She said, "Let's back up a minute and get clear about what our [purpose](#) is. What are we trying to do?"

### Lesson:

First, Denise helped the class clarify and write their goal ([Step](#) <sup>2</sup>). They settled on this: "To figure out the kinds of jobs that we would like and that would meet our needs (pay, location, etc.)."

Then, she asked them to help her fill out a [learning plan](#) (see below) ([Step](#) <sup>3</sup>). They looked at the [EFF Standards Wheel](#) together to identify the related Standards, and picked the one they thought they needed to practice the most (Read with Understanding). Denise encouraged their participation, but

actually filled out most of the chart herself, explaining her thinking as she went. The students were very engaged by this because it helped them understand what they were going to learn and why.

<b>Learning Plan</b>		
<p><b>Goal:</b> <i>To figure out the kinds of jobs that we would like and that would meet our needs (pay, location, etc.).</i></p> <p><b>Primary Standard:</b> <i>Read with Understanding</i></p> <p><b>Related Standards:</b> <i>Learn through Research, Solve Problems and Make Decisions, Use Information and Communications Technology</i></p>		
What do we need to know?	How can we learn it?	How will we show we know it? (Step 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>how to read the information about jobs</i></li> <li>- <i>what different job titles mean; what the job is</i></li> <li>- <i>we need to figure out what's a good job for us</i></li> <li>- <i>we need to find out what jobs are around here</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>practice reading job info, small sections at a time</i></li> <li>- <i>learn the format of the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) so we know how to use it efficiently</i></li> <li>- <i>figure out which info is important and which we can skip</i></li> <li>- <i>talk about what we're reading so we can figure out what it means</i></li> <li>- <i>develop our own personal criteria for a good job</i></li> <li>- <i>spend time learning how to find our own information on the internet (about local jobs)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We'll be able to find the information we need more quickly than now (cause we'll know what parts to skip).</i></li> <li>- <i>We'll be able to say which jobs are a good fit or not and why.</i></li> <li>- <i>We'll be able to find answers to questions by looking in the right part of the OOH.</i></li> </ul>

Since this topic had already proven to be a challenging one to research on-line, Denise suggested that she deal with finding the information and that they focus instead on the task of reading what she finds. She promised that they would work with computers soon.

Then she turned to the Read with Understanding Standard to help her plan, more specifically, what to teach ([Step 3](#)).

Read with Understanding	How the Standard will be addressed in the lessons
Determine the reading purpose.	<i>The students have already seen that searching the web without a clear purpose was unproductive. To transfer this understanding to reading, we will talk about what we want to learn from the text and develop "reader questions."</i>
Select reading strategies appropriate to the purpose.	<i>They will practice scanning, note-taking, reading for detail, and other information-gathering strategies appropriate for this text. This first time, the teacher will guide their use of strategies.</i>
Monitor comprehension and adjust reading strategies.	<i>They will be monitored comprehension by taking notes and discussing their understanding of the text.</i>
Analyze the information and reflect on its underlying meaning.	<i>They will discuss what they learned about Medical Assistant jobs, their interpretations of the pros and cons, whether or not the text answered their questions, etc.</i>
Integrate it with prior knowledge to address reading purpose.	<i>The students will use their reading about one particular job to help them think more generally about criteria for a job that would suit them.</i>

The next day, Denise brought to class a text that she had downloaded from the U.S. Department of Labor's [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#). She had chosen information about Medical Assistant jobs, since most of the students were interested in these. There would be opportunities to look for information about other jobs after they reviewed one together.

To prepare the class to read this occasionally dense material, she used the "[Read with Understanding Guide](#)" to prompt discussion about the students' [prior experience](#) reading informational texts. They discussed questions such as:

What kinds of information have you read in the past?

What was hard or easy about it?

How did you read it?

How did you know if you understood?

What did you do with the information?

She discovered that they approached the reading of information the same way they read anything else, assuming that all parts of the text were equally important. This confirmed what Denise had already surmised - that they needed to broaden their repertoire of reading strategies in order to effectively read more varied material. She explained that there were ways to read information that might be more efficient and less frustrating for them, and designed the following strategy-building activities for their practice ([Step 5](#)):

**Pre-reading:** She gave the students two minutes to look at the Medical Assistant text and find out what it was about. When the time was up, she asked them how they had used the two minutes. They shared the various approaches they had used - looking at subheads to choose what to read, reading from the beginning, skimming the whole thing, etc. They discovered that the readers who had browsed or looked at subheads were better able to say what the text was about than those readers who had just started reading. Denise explained that they were each using reading "strategies," that you use different strategies for different kinds of reading, and that they had just discovered that scanning is a particularly useful strategy for getting a quick sense of what an informational text is about. Another useful strategy to use when reading information is to think beforehand about what you want to find out from the text, and they would practice this next.

**Reading :** Since students were at different reading levels, she put them in leveled pairs and assigned each pair one small section of the text (by difficulty). The sections included: Nature of the Work, Working Conditions, Training and Qualifications, Job Outlook, and Earnings. Before they started reading, each pair had to generate some questions they hoped their section would answer.

The pairs took notes on three things as they read: 1) answers to their questions, 2) other information they found interesting, and 3) new vocabulary. They also needed to mark, on the text, parts that were difficult for them or where they weren't sure if they understood so that the group could help them figure it out.

**Post-reading:** Back in the whole group, they shared what they had learned, talked about which questions had been answered and discussed any difficulties they had reading. They were excited to read that Medical Assistant jobs are one of the fastest growing occupations and that they don't always require formal training (they found this point buried amidst several paragraphs that recommended formal training), but were disappointed by the average earnings, which were \$23,000/year or just

above \$10/hour. They debated what "handle several responsibilities at once" really meant - whether it was a positive or negative aspect of the job. They were happy to find the OOH, where they could read about the day-to-day tasks of any job, and would know better "what they were getting into."

They ended with a class evaluation of the activity. This was a class ritual Denise used to build students' ability to [assess their own learning](#). She asked them, "Why did I have you do that activity? What did you learn from it?" Denise also collected their assignments and made her own notes about their reading development, and she would use these to determine which strategies needed more practice ([Step 6](#)). After a little more work, she'd also give them quiz on their ability to navigate the OHH.

For homework, the students had to write about their interest in the Medical Assistant job. This was another step in formulating their own individual criteria for what they wanted in a job. It was also the first of many assignments that Denise collected as evidence of progress on their goal.

**Homework: Thinking about the Possibilities**

1. What was interesting to you about the Medical Assistant jobs?
2. Do you think a Medical Assistant job could be a possibility for you? Why or why not?

In the next class, they shared their homework. Most of the class saw Medical Assistant jobs as a strong possibility for them, with reasons ranging from "I'm good at taking care of people," to "I need a job with security and this looks like it," to "I like to do a lot of the things that are in this job - keeping things organized, doing office work, keeping records, etc." These reasons became the beginning of their own personal job criteria lists.

Finally, the class looked back at the "How will we show we know it?" column of the Learning Plan to evaluate their progress and consider [next steps](#) ([Step 8](#)).

<b>How will we show we know it?</b>	<b>Progress we've made</b>
• We'll be able to find the information we need more quickly than now (cause we'll	• We need more practice looking for information, since we only did it once. But we think we'll be faster next

know what parts to skip).

- We'll be able to say which jobs are a good fit or not and why.
- We'll be able to find answers to questions by looking in the right part of the OOH.

time.

- We need to read about more jobs first. We wrote about the Medical Assistant jobs already.
- We know how to do this now and Denise is going to give us a quiz about it.

All of them had other jobs they wanted to read about, so the immediate follow-up they wanted was to work in groups to repeat this process. Further down the road, though, they realized they needed to find out which of these jobs were available in their community and to start researching their local context.